North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation manages more than 234,000 acres of iconic landscape across our state in our parks, recreation areas and natural areas with a mission dedicated to conservation, recreation and education. The state parks system welcomed more than 18 million visitors in 2017. Across North Carolina, state park ranger are proud of our parks and eager to welcome you and your family. Come to our parks to marvel at our state’s most beautiful natural resources, enjoy your favorite outdoor activities and learn about the rich science, culture and history that make our parks great.

Fun facts about North Carolina State Parks

- There are 41 places to visit, including 34 parks, four recreation areas and three staffed state natural areas.
- The Division manages four state rivers, seven state lakes and six state trails.
- There are about 581 miles of trail to explore in our parks.
- The first state park created was Mount Mitchell State Park on March 3, 1915. Fort Macon State Park was the second.
- The Division celebrated 100 years of being Naturally Wonderful in 2016.
- Parks that welcome over 1 million visitors annually include: Jockey’s Ridge, Fort Macon and William B. Umstead state parks and Falls Lake, Jordan Lake and Kerr Lake state recreation areas.
- The Division employs over 1,000 people across the state.
- Some unique activities you can do in our parks include: wind surfing and hang gliding at Jockey’s Ridge State Park, cross country skiing and snow shoeing at Elk Knob State Park, driving on the four-wheel-drive beach at Fort Fisher State Recreation Area and rock climbing at Chimney Rock, Crowders Mountain, Hanging Rock, Pilot Mountain and Stone Mountain state parks.
- Several parks have educational trails, called TRACK trails, that include activities for children to complete along the way.

Environmental Education Learning Experiences

Parks have their own curriculum guides that are correlated to the North Carolina Standard Course of Study. Competency goals in science, social studies, mathematics and English/language arts are available. Each program includes pre-visit, on-site and post-visit student activities that have measurable objectives, background information, vocabulary, references and step-by-step activity instructions.

Passport Program

How many state parks can you visit? Use your passport as a guide and collect stamps, earn prizes and make “Naturally Wonderful” memories! Pick up your passport at a state park near you.

North Carolina State Parks 100-Mile Challenge

Can you hike, bike or paddle 100 miles in a year? Join the N.C. State Parks’ 100-Mile Challenge and log your miles online to earn digital badges and redeem prizes as you reach various milestones! This is a great way to get outside, get moving and keep track of your activity. Visit www.nc100miles.org to sign up.

Reservations

Reservations can be made online at our website, by calling 1-877-722-6762 or in person at most state park offices. Online reservations must be made with a credit or debit card. Phone reservations can be made with a credit or debit card, money order or check.

Camping and Cabins

The state parks system has over 3,000 campsites available for reservation, including group sites, hike-in sites, canoe-in sites and equestrian sites. Campers, vacation or primitive cabins are also available at Carolina Beach, Cliffs of the Neuse, Hanging Rock, Morrow Mountain and William B. Umstead state parks.

Picnic Shelters

Reservable picnic shelters are affordable and ideal for large group gatherings. Unreserved picnic shelters are available free of charge on a first-come-first-served basis. However, the shelters are very popular, so reservations are strongly suggested.

Auditoriums/Classrooms

Ideal for civic groups, clubs and educational events, many parks have classrooms and/or auditoriums that seat from 25 to 100 people available to reserve. Conference rooms with seating up to 15 people are also available.

Community Buildings

Community buildings are available at Falls Lake and Kerr Lake state recreation areas and Lake Norman, Morrow Mountain and New River state parks. Community buildings have a large meeting space, kitchen facilities and restrooms. Some also have a fireplace and/or grill.

Discover More with a Ranger

Did you know that many plants atop Mount Mitchell are rare in North Carolina but common in Quebec? That the giant sand dunes at Jockey’s Ridge are constantly moving? Do you know how to safely hold a crayfish? From fishing lessons to astronomy programs and tree identification guides to guided paddles, parks offer programs for all ages. Visit our website for a list of upcoming programs at each park.

Junior Rangers

The Junior Ranger program offers educational and skill-based activities to encourage children to explore the outdoors. Children can complete activity guides, geared for ages 6-12, and attend ranger programs to earn a junior ranger patch unique to each park. Ask about the program at a park office or download the guide at: www.ncparks.gov/junior-rangers.

Fun facts about North Carolina State Parks

- We offer a variety of volunteer positions—from improving park grounds and leading education workshops to serving as a campground host. No matter how you volunteer, you will play an important role in the mission of the state parks system by helping preserve and protect our natural resources while providing for their use and enjoyment by visitors.

Learn more about volunteering and available opportunities at www.ncparks.gov/volunteer or contact a state park near you.

Volunteer

Do you have a special skill that would benefit our parks? We have over 1,000 people across the state.

In addition to the trails within our state parks, the Division is responsible for planning and coordinating the management of state trails. Currently, there are 8 state trails showcasing the natural, cultural and historic resources of North Carolina.

Established in 1973, the North Carolina Trails Program works to help citizens, organizations and agencies plan, develop and manage all types of trails, from greensways and trails for hiking, biking and horseback riding to paddle trails and off-road vehicle trails. Focus is given to developing sustainable trails, efficient trail maintenance, trail safety and developing accessible trail options.

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Mountains-to-Sea State Trail: A path that will link Clingman’s Dome in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park to Jockey’s Ridge State Park on the Outer Banks, this is the flagship project of the N.C. Trails Program. Today, over 650 miles of the planned 1,400 mile route are open for use.

Deep River State Trail: This hiking and paddling hybrid trail will start at the river’s headwaters near Jamestown, continuing through Randolph, Moore and Chatham counties, and ending at the confluence of the Deep River and Haw River near Moncure.

Fonta Flora State Trail: This trail will connect Morganton and Asheville, looping around Lake James for spectacular scenery. Portions of this hiking trail will be open to biking as well.

French Broad River State Trail: Starting from Rosman, N.C., this paddle trail extends 117 miles to the Tennessee-North Carolina border. Access is available along the blueway.

Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail: Authorized in 2017, this newest state trail will create a hiking and biking path around Lake Lure, through Chimney Rock State Park and circling Bearwallow Mountain.

 Yadkin River State Trail: The 130 mile paddle trail begins at W. Kerr Scott Reservoir, traverses seven counties and ends at High Rock Lake. Access is available along the blueway.

Take advantage of the full state parks experience with our Annual Pass program!

Boat rentals, swim passes and entry to recreational areas are included, as well as unique experiences like the ferry at Hammocks Beach, four-wheel-drive access at Fort Fisher and bike rentals at Dismal Swamp.

If you’re bringing your family or friends on your adventures, choose the Family Pass. It’s the best deal for your group of six—whether it’s your kids, your siblings or your hiking and biking buddies.

Get your pass now for a year of outdoor fun!

For a list of locations where you can buy the passes, visit www.ncparks.gov/annual-pass-program.